

Intuitive Fasting, Metabolic Flexibility & Metaphysical Meals – Dr. Will Cole with Dave Asprey – #796

Announcer:

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Dave Asprey:

You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey. Today, we're going to talk about intuitive fasting and getting in touch with real hunger with a guy who really knows what he's talking about. I'm talking about Dr. Will Cole, leading functional medicine nutrition expert and senior clinic director at the Cole Natural Health Centers in Pittsburgh, one of the top 50 functional and integrative doctors in the country, and he looks at chronic disease and things like thyroid and inflammation.

He's also known for his book, the Ketotarian, and he has a new book that is right up your alley. If you like Bulletproof intermittent fasting, if you liked Fast This Way, you absolutely have to read his new book, which is called Intuitive Fasting. It's this idea that fasting doesn't have to be rigid and painful and that there's really good stuff you can do there, and that it doesn't have to be the same every day. So, Will and I are in great agreement on a lot of things but not everything, and we're going to go deep on fasting for you today. And if you're saying, "I'm really tired of fasting," trust me, we're going to talk about a lot of stuff that isn't fasting because he's a functional doctor. I'm going to pick his brain all over the place. Will, welcome to the show.

Dr. Will Cole:

Thank you, my friend. It's truly an honor. I'm excited to be talking.

Dave:

You've also just launched The Art of Being Well, your new podcast, which comes on the heels of Goopfellas and some other very successful podcasts. So I'm excited you've got your own show.

Will:

Thank you.

Dave:

I think it's important. We need way more functional medicine leaders out there saying, "I'm not just interviewing people, but I'm sharing the stuff that works in the clinic," so when you see some garbage headline that just makes no sense, you can say, "Well, here's my take on it, and I've got a license," and you can talk to other people like me who are unlicensed biohackers who really don't know anything.

Will:

Oh, please. You know more than most doctors do in this world. There's no doubt about that. But I appreciate the kind words, and it is true. It's like when you talk about this thing 10 hours a day, we talk about wellness, functional medicine all day long, consulting patients, it's kind of like the air you breathe, and it's easy to talk about. And I'm excited for the chance to share case studies and the deep dive stuff that I love to help people with and help people overcome these things.

Dave:

How long have you been fasting?

Will:

Well, I've been fasting professionally, consulting patients with it, for the past 12 years.

Dave:

12 years.

Will:

But personally, 15 years, doing it myself, personally.

Dave:

Take me back 12 years, when you first told a patient to fast.

Will:

Oh, boy.

Dave:

Did they punch you?

Will:

Yeah. You know what, that's the duality of what we do in functional medicine, the science and then the art of it. The science is like, well, I know on paper, this lab is saying, "You'd really benefit... You're really metabolically inflexible, you have chronic inflammation, you have gut issues, your body's reacting to every food under the sun," and then you have to see the art of it all, the space in between the words, the is this person even ready for this? Where's their head and their heart? Where are they at intellectually and emotionally with this stuff?

So sometimes, it's leading people into these practices, leading people into these tools of functional medicine where they actually can digest it, no pun intended, where they actually can take it in and receive it. Because sometimes, there's more stuff that they could benefit from than the vessel can contain, and sometimes it's just meeting them where they're at and realizing we don't have to do everything all at once. But most of my patients are really complex, complicated patients who have done a lot, so most of them wouldn't hit me over the head with fasting, but I imagine you could really rock somebody's world if they're new to this.

Dave:

When I weighed 300 pounds and I was much younger, I remember someone suggested skipping a meal or whatever, and I was so offended. So I'm like, "Don't you know I'll go into starvation mode and I'll be hypo, bitchy, and all that kind of stuff." And there's a lot of emotional stuff which led me to write a lot of the emotional stuff in my take on fasting. But I like the word that you used in Intuitive Fasting, in the title there. What makes what you're recommending intuitive compared to all of the fasting stuff that's out there? I mean, fasting is kind of like don't eat, there you go. So.

Will:

[crosstalk 00:04:37].

Dave:

What's different?

Will:

It's probably a paradoxical statement at first. How could fasting be intuitive? And in some ways, that's true. It is, they're two different things of when somebody's metabolically inflexible, meaning if somebody's hangry and they're on the blood sugar roller coaster and they are in this sugar burning mode, it's going to seem very counterintuitive to say fasting. That's going to seem miserable and make them angry and shaky, and all that stuff.

So why I called the book Intuitive Fasting is because I want people to actually get to the place where they are guided by their intuition, where they can hear that still small voice of that knowingness of what their body needs and what their body doesn't need, at any given moment. So we're actually putting in the work to get there because, I mean, you know this more than most people, but for people that don't know, when your body is out of balance, when there's inflammation, chronic inflammation, when there's autoimmune flares, when there's hormonal imbalance, when there's signaling problems going on in the body, that's that proverbial noise going on physiologically, where it's really hard to discern what's up and what's down, what your body needs, what it doesn't need. So they have to quiet that noise. And I think, without a doubt, what I've seen clinically over the years of pairing flexible, intermittent fasting, with a clean, nutrient-dense diet that complements that fast and vice versa, the fast complements the food, you can start to build that flexibility, start to build that metabolic resilience, so they can actually have proper signaling pathways to have that true intuition, to get to that place of intuitive eating, and get to the place of intuitive fasting.

But we live in this social media culture where people say, "Oh, I'm an intuitive eater. That's what I am. I am an intuitive eater." That sounds nice and sexy and wow, it's so nice, but-

Dave:

No it doesn't. If I was intuitive you know it'd be like pizza and French fries.

Will:

Exactly the point that... Exactly, so-

Dave:

It sounds like such BS to me-

Will:

It is.

Dave:

It [crosstalk 00:06:38] means I have no standards, and I have no willpower and I don't even want to think about what I eat. I'm just going to eat what I feel like.

Will:

Right.

Dave:

It's like cotton candy forever. How can that work?

Will:

Exactly.

Dave:

Am I a little off the rails here, or?

Will:

Well, I think when somebody is, has, I mean, we can talk about scent memory and food memory and the way that our brain works with certain foods, but it's largely with when somebody is inflamed, has metabolic inflexibility, their cravings will mask themselves as true intuition, but if somebody is truly practicing what they teach or practicing these principles of wanting to be well and wanting to be metabolically flexible, you actually can know, "Hey, this food," you'll have the knowingness of saying, "No, that food is going to make me feel lousy." And that intuition will supersede that craving. That intuition will be more obvious and you'll have that space to realize you aren't your thoughts and emotions, you are the observing awareness of them.

Most people are so divorced from that, and they're just, they think that they're thoughts and emotions, they think they are their cravings, and they just go for whatever. There's so much impulsiveness going on. So I want to create a space between that observation, but it's really hard to do that when you're completely in sugar burning mode.

Dave:

It seems like a catch 22.

Will:

Mm-hmm (neutral).

Dave:

Now, if you're in sugar burning mode, which most people are, I mean, let's face it-

Will:

Most people are.

Dave:

Unless they're longtime listeners of the show, they've done some really intense work, they've lost a bunch of weight or they've made changes in their life. But a good number people listening, okay, you eat carbs every day, you're in sugar burning mode. That's just how it works.

Will:

Yeah.

Dave:

But it's a catch 22, because, all right, if you could just get out of sugar burning mode, it'd be so easy to get out of sugar burning mode.

Will:

Yeah.

Dave:

How do you break the cycle?

Will:

Well, you to put the time in. I mean, these are not quick fix issues. What has taken years, decades, someone's, most of their entire adult life and childhood, gets to that place of a lot of metabolic rigidity. It's going to take time. So they... I mean, it's going to take weeks and months and months and months down the line to really start leaning into this, but it's not they have to wait that long to start feeling better. I mean, you and I both know, when they start making these changes, the body is amazingly resilient.

They will start to see, "Whoa, I have a lot more discernment, I have a lot more knowledge of what my body loves and doesn't love," whereas before, they just were at the whims of their cravings. But it's really cool to see somebody that is in the throes of inflammation, in the throes of insatiable cravings, start to see, have an awareness about their health that they've never had before. And they start to have this, "Whoa, I actually had that food that caused the inflammation flare, I had the food that I was really craving and actually didn't like it as much as I used to."

So they have this own checks and balances, this own regulatory system in and of themselves. And that's the intuition that starts to grow. It happens on a mental, emotional, spiritual level, but it also happens on a physical level too as the microbiome is changing, as the hormones are changing, as blood sugar becomes more stable, et cetera.

Dave:

My daughter, who is 13 and doesn't do a lot of snacking, just because they eat food that actually makes you full, so you don't need to snack.

Will:

Yeah.

Dave:

She came to me the other day and she's like, "Daddy, I just don't want breakfast this weekend. I'm just not hungry." Right, and now the typical parent's like, "Well, you have to eat." And I thought about it and I'm like, "All right, well if you're not hungry, this is going to sound weird, but don't eat, but pay attention because if you get hungry later, you should eat." My kids are not asking to fast a lot and I wouldn't support it if they wanted to, but is that kind of what we're talking about here? Even if a kid's like-

Will:

Yeah.

Dave:

Just don't eat if you're not hungry.

Will:

Yeah, eat when you're hungry. Eat until you're satiated. These core principles that are so common sense, but it's not common sense for somebody that's completely out of balance. It's actually not common sense at all. They'll eat just because they're bored. They'll eat because they're angry. They'll eat because they're stressed. They'll eat because they're going through a stressful time. There's a complete reactivity to their foods, and they're completely unconscious of what they're doing, oftentimes. So it's exactly what your daughter is doing. She's doing intuitive fasting. Exactly. It's light, gentle, flexible, intuitive. It's not arduous. It's not punitive.

I have a 14 year old too, and he does the same thing. He says the same thing, "I'm not hungry." Knowing, coming from where I'm coming from, it's like, "Okay, it's all right. Breakfast isn't the most important meal of the day just because we said so."

Dave:

Right.

Will:

You should be okay with eating when you're hungry, not force feeding yourself because it's breakfast and it's what we do.

Dave:

Now, my daughter may or may not have told me that she thinks ice cream is, of course dairy-free ice cream, is the best way to break a fast. Is she right?

Will:

My son would say the same thing. [crosstalk 00:11:35].

Dave:

The other side of intuitive eating rears its head.

Will:

Yeah, right. Exactly. I mean, but there's a centeredness. There's a cent... It doesn't mean that everybody's perfect and eats the perfect, they're just throwing back kombucha and grass-fed beef all day long. It's ultimately it is... People have to live their life, but they still have their center and they still have that knowingness and they still have their, "I'll eat this and then I'll move on." They're not kind of having this disordered relationship with food and their bodies.

So is ice cream a good way to break a fast? I mean, not necessarily, no. I mean, it's gentle on the gut in many ways. I guess we're talking about making that some Bulletproof ice cream. I think we can be okay with that for when you're 14 years old.

Dave:

Yeah. If it was Bulletproof ice cream. Now she wants some stuff that has a little bit of a agave in it, which I'm not a huge fan of. But you know what, at that age-

Will:

Yes, too much fructose in that.

Dave:

A little bit of that, you're getting eight grams of agave when you're 13. I'm pretty sure you can handle it. And she's not really fasting, she's skipping breakfast.

Will:

Yes, exactly.

Dave:

And lunch time comes around, and we have a healthy lunch and if she wants something afterwards, it's a weekend.

Will:

That's a grace and lightness. I mean, we're teaching this to our kids, which is so super important. Can you imagine if we heard this when we were kids? But these are also things that we need to hear as adults too, because this is stuff we have to unlearn. We have to unlearn what we've been raised with.

Dave:

So I got asked you this, Will.

Will:

Yeah.

Dave:

Your hair's pretty epic. What do you do to it?

Will:

I just throw something in it in the morning, but [crosstalk 00:13:11] it's not much, man. It's like... I have coarse hair, so [inaudible 00:13:16] a comment on my hair, but it just kind of does its own thing. I just throw some on, this, it's called Jack Henry, it's like this natural paste [inaudible 00:13:26], so it smells good.

Dave:

[crosstalk 00:13:26] Natural paste. Well, you're looking very fashionable if I could say so myself.

Will:

Thank you. Thank you.

Dave:

It's because you, yeah you work with [Gwyneth 00:13:33]? No, people have been giving me crap about my hair, because it's much thicker than it used to be because I fixed it. And-

Will:

Love it. It looks good.

Dave:

Oh, thanks, man. And I wanted to ask about here, not just because you have lots of hair, but because a lot of people, especially women, are talking about fasting and hair. Let's go there. Tell me about fasting and hair.

Will:

We're all coming in, everybody that's listening to this, all my patients, they're all coming into this journey of health and wellness or journey of learning about their body, improving their quality of life, at different points of their life, right. So they're all coming in with a baseline that's different. And we're all created differently. This is the heart of functional medicine. And we're all at different points of our journey, too.

So, when you start changing any way of eating, or fasting or supplementation, it's having a huge cascade effect on your body. It's shifting the microbiome, it's shifting your hormones, and we know that longer-term ketosis and fasting, for people that are new, that doesn't mean your followers aren't savvy. So but for people that are new to this that are not knowing what's going on when they're fasting, they're increasing ketosis. So the ketogenic diet and fasting are both increasing ketosis, which is really great. It's really great. It's a signaling molecule. It's lowering inflammation. It's increasing anti-aging pathways. The things that you're talking about in your book so brilliantly, and the things that I talk about, that all the stuff that we want is, it's happening during the state of ketosis, but it's the Goldilocks principle. It's not too high, not too low, but just right. And we all have to find our own Goldilocks principle of how to use this amazing tool of fasting, or the ketogenic diet, or any tool in wellness. We have to learn how to use this tool that works for us sustainably, because you and I are not, in our hearts and passions isn't just to do a fad thing. It's to really integrate feeling great in your life.

And it's so easy to be in the tribalism, extremist, absolutism of social media pontification of like, "Well, fasting's bad for women," or, "Keto is bad for this," or, "This is not for everybody." Well, if I hung my hat on one thing for everybody consulting patients online, I'd be proven wrong all day long. I have to keep an open mind, an open heart to how do we look at the context. And context matters when it comes to something like fasting. So too much fasting, long-term, forever and ever, deep fasting doesn't work for all women.

Women are... And you have to talk about, I mean, women will get this but maybe people that aren't women will realize that all women are different too. So I don't want to make broad sweeping statements here.

Dave:

That's totally true.

Will:

Does she have PCOS? Does she have endometriosis? Does she have insulin resistance? That's a completely different woman than somebody that doesn't have those things, that has slightly low thyroid function, lower leptin, her leptin is not really high. Those two sets of women, and that's just two sets of women [inaudible 00:16:37] the myriad of different possibilities and variables to consider. That interaction with fasting will be different. So the women with PCOS and endometriosis and insulin

resistance tend to do better with more fasting, and the women that don't have that will benefit from lighter, more flexible fasting. But I think, as you talk about in your book and I talk about in Intuitive Fasting, the variation is really where the magic is.

Dave:

Ah, thank you for saying that. And also, I don't think I called out intuition enough in my book. So just instead of intuitive fasting, it's not the same every day, because I'm using my intuition.

Will:

Yeah.

Dave:

We needed a doctor to step up and say that.

Will:

Well, what you do say in your book is flexible.

Dave:

Yeah.

Will:

You use the word flexible, throughout. So I think it's the same thing. It's not feeling like you're failing because you aren't doing the same thing. And as you say, in the book, if you wake up one day and you're not feeling like you want to deeper fast, that's okay. You can pivot and have that. And sometimes anybody, women included, feel like they, well more is better, and then they're cycles thrown off, and they're not having their period, or they're losing their hair and then they think, "Well, fasting's failing me. Fasting is not working for me." Well, it's just how you're using it, and that doesn't mean you throw the baby out with the bathwater and just say, "Well, it doesn't work for me." It's just like, well, how are using it. Let's find a way where you can leverage the benefits without falling prey to these potential drawbacks, for some people.

Dave:

It's funny, fasting, keto, even the vegan diet, which I'm not exactly a big proponent of, all of them can be useful for brief periods of time.

Will:

Yeah.

Dave:

But then you're like, "I feel so good, I'm just going to dive in," and all of them will trash you over time.

Will:

Right.

Dave:

Tell me about the worst case of a patient who was trashed by fasting you've ever seen.

Will:

Well, I mean, I think that I have a lot of cases that I have seen over the years of people who have various degrees of orthorexia-

Dave:

Yes.

Will:

Which is a disordered eating around healthy foods, and fasting can fall into that and that amazing tool of fasting can be abused, and can be used improperly and that's the antithesis of what you and I advocate for. That's the antithesis of intuitive. That's shame and punishment and obsession. That's an eating disorder disguised as a wellness practice. That is the opposite of what we're talking about here.

Dave:

Well, even bodybuilding.

Will:

Totally. Totally.

Dave:

Is that for a lot of people. Right.

Will:

Right. It's just it's such a source of stress and obsession, where I see cases like that, that they're fasting so aggressively and they have such a bad relationship with fasting and eating, that that... There are a lot of cases that we have to work with people [inaudible 00:19:15] to deal with the mental emotional side of things and working with eating disorder specialists in conjunction with functional medicine, to really use it in a way that works for their body and not against them. So there's a lot of examples of that. So that comes to mind. But there are many examples that I could probably go through and think about, over the years of people using fasting that's out of balance with what's working for them. And it's something that could serve them well but it's caught being a source of unintentional saboteur.

Dave:

If I'm working on your intuitive fasting plan, how do I know if a craving is emotional, or biological, or gut biome, or...

Will:

Mm-hmm (neutral).

Dave:

How would I know if it's a craving or real hunger?

Will:

Yeah, it's a great question. So I think that, first of all, I think when somebody is really metabolically rigid, and they're super sugar burning, they're hangry, they're irritable, they're kind of bound by that next snack and that next meal.

Dave:

Like I used to be.

Will:

Oh, yeah, right. And so many people are. I mean, there's no shame in that. It's just where they're at this point. When you start leaning into even light time-restricted feeding windows, light, intermittent fasting, even a 12 12 window. If they're eating between 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM, even that late night snack will be difficult to stop.

Dave:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Will:

So at that point, if you're looking at that context, it's going to be the more... That's not a deep fast, and if they're craving, they have plenty of time to eat and be well-satiated and nourished. It's not a deep fasting window, but even then, you can know, something on that level is going to be the blood sugar hangriness. It's going to be the fact that that kindling's off that fire, and then they're in this sort of metabolic purgatory because they aren't able to get that kindling on the fire as much as they want to, that sugar, that quick fix that they're looking for, and they're kind of addicted to.

So at that point, you know it's not really intuition. It's really going to be something that's going to actually move them away from homeostasis. It's going to actually perpetuate imbalance and inflammation levels in the body. So, that's one way to check into it, but I would say... Something that I advocate throughout the book is what I call metaphysical meals. It's that when you are leaning into these deeper intermittent fasting windows, is to really use that time of when you would normally have breakfast, lunch, and dinner, or whatever fast that you're doing. If you're doing two meals a day, when you normally would have that meal that you're not having that meal, to use that as a time to go inward, to actually do a mindfulness practice, and I give some examples in the book, whether that's journaling, or a meditation practice, or a breathing exercise, or any one of these things. Forests, going out in nature and checking in with yourself.

So you could start to create that awareness of checking in with your body. Check in with your cravings. Check in with your energy levels. Check in with your digestion to know and have that awareness, and that's the intuition that's growing, that's starting to be able to shine through the physiological imbalances and noise in the body. So that's what I would say. Is that an easy thing to do all the time? Absolutely not. It's going to take practice and that's what we're all doing. We're all practicing these things and we're all getting stronger as we practice. And mindfulness and awareness and getting in touch with intuition is no exception to that.

Dave:

It sounds like you sort of feel your way into it, for lack of a better word.

Will:

Yeah. Absolutely.

Dave:

There isn't a hard and fast rule that I've been able to find. I know for myself, now, if I eat something and 10 minutes later, I'm really hungry, that's biological, right?

Will:

Yeah.

Dave:

I ate something that had a toxin that triggered my body's desire for glucose to get rid of the toxin.

Will:

Yeah.

Dave:

Or I ate something like MSG that I didn't know was in there that caused a drop in my blood sugar, or I ate some histamine that causes an increased demand for sugar to deal with it. Those are biological, but I haven't in a long time had what I used to have, which was that, I'm just nagging hunger, maybe it's a longer term hyperglycemia, or maybe it's I'm just bored. But man, it really took me years to get there, and I... The reason I started my whole blog, the reason I started this podcast, I just want people to learn all this stuff because I spent a million dollars and I suffered a long time, and I fasted in a cave and all sorts of weird stuff that I shouldn't have had to do. If I could have just made an appointment with you, Will. I'm going to go the doctor, he's going to tell me, "Dave, skip breakfast sometimes, dumbass," and that would've been all I needed to do when I was 20. Maybe there was more. But that would have been so life changing.

But at this point, I can say I know, but I don't know how to teach it and I think you hit some good stuff in Intuitive Fasting, I almost called it intuitive eating, which is the opposite of that. But you hit on it, and maybe you're shortening the amount of time that it takes a reader or a patient to just know, "Oh, wait, it's okay to eat now, I did something wrong," versus, "This is actually something that I'm just going to ride out."

Will:

Yeah.

Dave:

What do you say to a patient in the office with you when they're asking you that question? Guide me as if I was a patient.

Will:

Mm-hmm (neutral). Well, I mean, that earlier duality that I mentioned, that science and the art, it is such a... So much of my job is proverbially holding somebody by the hand and walking them through this and disseminating the science, disseminating the labs, disseminating all this stuff that we read about

and love so much that not everybody is going to get it at that level. Not everybody is going to... It's not going to even make sense. How do I apply this realistically in my life? And how do I make sense of it all? Because, I mean, Dr. Google is a very conflicted physician. I mean, there's so much things we could substantiate with the click of a button.

Dave:

I thought Dr. Google got acquired by big pharma. You can't find anything on Dr. Google. I might have to get a some other search engine to find anything useful on health.

Will:

Yeah, you're right. You're right. But even, yeah, you're right. It's definitely true, definitely true. And, but even the way that Dr. Google is sterilized right now, because of the censorship that's going on, there's still a lot of that censored information to weed through.

Dave:

There is.

Will:

And then there's the uncensored stuff that I have to tell people about too. What's the stuff that you're not going to find on the first page of Google? How do we make this practical in your life?

Dave:

Have you seen people doing 10 or 20 or 30-day fasts in the dark? The super extreme, long-term fasting?

Will:

Not the dark part, but yeah, the long fasting, water fasts, yeah.

Dave:

Yeah, water fasts for 10, 20 day, definitely. Yeah. There's some places in India where it's part of an extreme anti-aging program.

Will:

Wow.

Dave:

Where you go and you're fasting from light at the same time.

Will:

Oh, amazing. No, I haven't seen that or heard of that. I'd love to know more about it, though.

Dave:

I was hoping that you'd be like, "Oh, yeah, I did it."

Will:

No, no, no, no, no.

Dave:

I haven't talked to anyone who's done it for more than a week in a cave, like some forms of the [inaudible 00:26:29] and darkness. But-

Will:

Talk about deep meditative process.

Dave:

Yeah.

Will:

I can only imagine the untangling that happens there.

Dave:

I found some research when I was writing about mitochondria in Superhuman that said up to 10% of the energy we make can come from sunlight directly, which blew me away because I didn't think we had photosynthesis, and it's not exactly photosynthesis, but the process was explained well enough, biochemically, like, "Okay, yeah, that makes sense. It's just something that we don't really rely on."

Will:

Yeah.

Dave:

So, you're thinking, "Man, I got no food. At least I still have air but I've done breathing exercises, so maybe I modify that, and then I got no light," that's pretty aggressive. I kind of want to try it because I'm a guinea pig but-

Will:

Yeah, you need to document that. I don't know how you'd get cameras in the dark but maybe some night vision cameras. It'd be interesting to see the process of what goes on in there. I'm sure it could be probably pretty intense.

Dave:

I guess if I did it for a week or something, I could pull it off. I have kids.

Will:

Yeah.

Dave:

It's not polite to, "Hey, guys. I'm going to be gone for a month."

Will:

See you back in 30 days.

Dave:

"And I'm going to come back to super pale and thin."

Will:

Have you ever seen the documentaries with the guys in Antarctica, the pole where they're not getting much sunlight, and they're stuck inside for long periods of time, and what that does to the human body, human health. It's pretty [crosstalk 00:27:53].

Dave:

It's brutal, but at least we don't have to go to the Arctic to do that anymore.

Will:

No. Find a cave somewhere.

Dave:

Just go to L.A., and that's kind of life in L.A. right now.

Will:

Life in L.A.

Dave:

I say that as a small business restaurant owner in L.A. So [crosstalk 00:28:07].

Will:

Yes, I love your place. Venice Beach. Beautiful.

Dave:

Oh, thank you. You've been?

Will:

Oh, yes, of course. My wife's from Los Angeles, so every time we go out there, I make a stop at your place. So it's [crosstalk 00:28:17].

Dave:

Ah, you're awesome. Well, if you stop, it's takeout only until they change the rules again, for whatever reason.

Will:

Yeah. Yeah.

Dave:

What about fasting during times when it's cold and flu season? Is fasting a good idea for immunity?

Will:

Yeah. Absolutely. Absolutely, it is. So there's so many things that come to mind, I mean... Well, I mean, an easy one is that 75, 80% of our immune system's in the gut, so that the healthy modulating effect of the microbiome and sort of this gentle pruning, resetting of the gut microbiome, and our microbiome has a circadian rhythm similar to hormones.

Dave:

Yes.

Will:

So it's like the difference-

Dave:

Talk more about that. It's fascinating and awesome and most people don't know.

Will:

Yeah, so certain colony-forming units of bacteria, beneficial probiotic, the things that helped regulate our immune system, certain colonies are higher in the morning, and certain colonies are higher in the evening. So, times of fasting helps to really allow the microbiome to find its natural rhythm, because it's always being well, and many, for many people in the West, it's constantly being insulted by disruptors of the microbiome, aggravators the microbiome.

So, letting that little reprieve to allow the microbiome, all these trillions of bacteria, to actually recalibrate themselves is one beneficial mechanism that comes to mind of really supporting a healthy, robust, but healthy, normal-responded immune system, where you're not having these hyper inflammatory responses. But I mean, look, then you talk, you mentioned mitochondria. I mean, mitochondrial biogenesis, you can tap into with fasting, improved autophagy, upregulated autophagy, or cellular recycling pathways. There's so many things that could happen and all of this stuff is predicated on the fact that fasting is a hormesis, is a hormetic effect in the body. So that slightly good stressed response that fasting brings is really good for the immune system.

So Paracelsus, for people that don't know, he's one of the fathers of modern medicine. We have Hippocrates, everyone knows Hippocrates, but Paracelsus is like... People need to know more about this guy. But he lived in the late 1400s, early 1500s, in Switzerland. He was called the father of toxicology. He called fasting, "The physician within."

Dave:

Wow.

Will:

So I think more people during cold and flu season could be leaning, instead of Dr. Google, call the physician within.

Dave:

I love the way you referenced that. I did find some studies, and I'm doing a bunch of blog stuff like you are, on your blog about fasting and just teaching people, right. And I found some studies showing, hey, if you're dealing with a bacterial infection, especially fasting just really can save your life. It's a big deal.

Will:

Yeah.

Dave:

Right. And that's not something that necessarily people would think of. And then with viruses, if you're actually sick with the virus, it looks like you probably want to eat during that time, but you don't want to eat a bunch of sugar and garbage, but you want maybe a little bit more fuel.

Will:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dave:

And that idea to be, oh, today, I feel sniffly. Maybe it's not a fasting day, or maybe it is but to be intuitive about it. I mean, that's the right thing to do.

Will:

Yeah. Yeah, even if it's a light time-restricted feeding window, doesn't have to be super aggressive. Like you said, go with your body. But I know, just through this last 2020, if I felt like I was rundown, I never had COVID or anything like that, but if I was feeling a little rundown, I would just intuitively fast or I wouldn't eat as much, kind of preserve my energy. And I recover a lot faster when I'm in this sort of light fasting state. And that doesn't mean that everybody has to do that all the time, but it's just a tool that people can lean into and experiment with.

Dave:

Yeah, if something is not good in the gut and in the sinuses, or whatever, yeah, skipping breakfast and maybe lunch, huge differences.

Will:

Totally. And the balancing effect it has on blood sugar and insulin too. I mean, that can't be forgotten about, as well.

Dave:

Of course. What about when people say you have to only have water drink fasts, because that's what happened in a mouse study, or water and salt. How strict do you think people need to be on what they eat or drink while fasting?

Will:

Well, I think that it's definitely not all or nothing. It's a continuum of people, a continuum of results, and everybody's different in that way. So it's, to me... Actually, I think that I've heard you say this years ago, and it stuck with me, is the fasting that's right for you is the fasting you can stick with.

Dave:

Sure, same with exercise programs, right?

Will:

Yeah.

Dave:

The one you're going to do.

Will:

So, they don't have to feel like a failure if they... That tea latte in the morning and that Bulletproof coffee in the morning, that's not breaking your fast. You get some of these extreme... I don't know what to call it, but I don't call them orthorexia.

Dave:

There are angry fasters out there, just as there are angry keto and angry vegans.

Will:

Yeah. [crosstalk 00:33:33].

Dave:

And then there are ones who are curious. I like the curious ones. The angry ones, I mostly am like, "You can yell about whatever."

Will:

Exactly.

Dave:

Only the other seventh graders are listening.

Will:

Exactly. So the militant, zealot fasters out there will say, "Well, it's completely... Why are you even fasting," pretty much. I mean, it may not be that extreme, but they're basically saying that it's a bad thing. And honestly, to the layperson, I'll just tell you, as someone who talks to laypeople all day long, it adds into this orthorexia where they feel like they are like a failure, it's all or nothing, and they might as well just stop it all because they're hearing all this, "Do all, or you're a failure."

So, as long as you're not... I mean, the one exception is if too many calories or too much protein, which mTOR is sensitive to that. Other than that, something that's not overly stimulating insulin-

Dave:

There you go.

Will:

Which fat is not.

Dave:

Shocking.

Will:

You're good. You're going to get so many good things versus any potential downregulation of some random pathway that you don't even care about anyways.

Dave:

Well said. I love that some random pathway. It's so beautiful. I like to talk about my wife, Dr. Lana's ice cream fast. She was doing a five-day fast, and the whole fast, she's cooking food for our kids, okay. That takes a little bit of, I'm just going to call it balls.

Will:

Yeah.

Dave:

Right, because you're tempted. And she had one bite of ice cream in the middle of the fast, a small, just a taste of it, right? Which is also courageous, because if you have one, the odds of you having 10 are very high. And she just had one and was like, "Okay, I just want to taste it. I'm good." And the kids are like, "Mommy [inaudible 00:35:19] ice cream fast," and in my mind, I'm like, "She fasted perfectly for five days," and that wasn't a failure, even in a little bit. She tasted something. It just doesn't matter.

Will:

Mm-mm (negative).

Dave:

Right. How do we teach people to be kind to themselves the way Lana was, if they're fasting, and then they break their fast early, or then they taste something? Is there a recipe on the intuitive side of fasting that just be like, "Hey, it's okay." How do you teach that to a patient?

Will:

I think it's consistently showing up for yourself and consistently checking in, and that's why mindfulness practice, and that word is overused so much. So what I really mean, whatever that looks like for you to start to grow in awareness, whatever that looks like, it's starting being mindful of your relationship with your body and relationship with food and checking yourself. So when you see yourself feeling like a failure, your shame, you're feeling your whole thought, life up with shameful obsessive ruminating thoughts, that is something that you need to be conscious of and mindful of. Take those thoughts captive, as the Bible calls it, to just create a separation between you and those obsessive ruminating thoughts. So, that doesn't happen overnight. There's not a five-step program that's going to solve you from that, but we're all working on that as human beings, to not be led by those shameful obsessive thoughts. Because what your wife did was actually the right thing to do.

So I think that there should be a grace and a lightness infused into wellness, which it's really not right now. I mean, there's so much tribalism and so much obsessive absolutism that's going on. That's

the antithesis to sustainable wellness, because it won't be sustainable if people fall off the wagon, so to speak. I don't want there to be a wagon. I want there to be like your life is the wagon, you cannot get off of it and there are things that move you towards feeling great, and there's things that move you away from feeling great. And by growing in awareness, the things that don't make you feel great, you can use that as a mindfulness practice too, and say, "Well, was this worth it? How is my energy levels? Was their inflammation afterwards? How's my digestion?"

All these things, and you can decide for yourself, as a grown-up, as a wise human being, did this serve you or not? Was this worth it or not? And either using that as a learning experience to not do that again next time, because it wasn't worth it. You'd rather feel so great than you miss that food that made you feel really horrible, and it's not punitive anymore, and you're free from that. You actually have food peace. Or it was really worth it, and you eat it and you move on.

Dave:

There you go.

Will:

And it doesn't matter.

Dave:

It was worth it is such a big question-

Will:

Yes.

Dave:

That you can ask yourself, and sometimes the pizza's worth it. It's all right, right?

Will:

Totally. Totally. And we all have our own... The analogy that I use with patients is we all have different mug sizes. I have this mason jar with tea in it on the other side of this camera, but some people have massive mason jars. Some people have small mason jars. And that's our genetic tolerance to stressors. If somebody has a super small mason jar, if they have many autoimmune issues, celiac disease, then that little piece of that gluten is going to cause a flare up and it's not going to be worth it for them. They still might need to use these tools that we're talking about in this conversation to empty that mason jar. And we can't change our mason jar size, but we can change what we put into it. Some people have massive mason jars, or just average mason jars, and that bite of pizza isn't going to matter because they're doing way more good. They're emptying it more than they're filling it up. And when it's overflowing, that's the symptoms and that's the problems and anything like that. So my job in functional medicine is to empty the mason jars as much as we can.

Dave:

I love that. Who makes a better faster, Republicans or Democrats?

Will:

Libertarians, I would say.

Dave:

You were just talking about tribalism, I had to ask. I'm sorry.

Will:

The truth's somewhere, normally somewhere in the middle. So it's, I don't know.

Dave:

Well, it seems like the truth is in the middle for almost everything, even fasting, thus intuitive fasting, right?

Will:

Yeah.

Dave:

And I'm so annoyed when I look at the modern keto movement and where it's gone versus from where it started. Cyclical keto, maybe that's kind of a thing to do, but it's like you gotta be all or nothing. And-

Will:

Yeah. You're a failure if you leave ketosis.

Dave:

Yeah, like, "Did you eat a carb? You're a bad person," and I'm just like, "I'm so done with that." Because I did get thyroid issues when I was experimenting for the Bulletproof Diet. [inaudible 00:39:54] all in one serving of broccoli a day, no other carbs. After three months of that, my sleep got destroyed, my hair got thinner, my thyroid got worse even though it wasn't that good to start with. Gee, I wonder, right. And then, you fast forward and people are making the mistake more and more and then people are over fasting.

Will:

Yeah.

Dave:

And so I think you've done something really good with Intuitive Fasting. We're just calling that out and saying, "It's okay to mix it up."

Will:

Yeah.

Dave:

And that message, I'm hoping, in 2021 that you'll be one of the leading voices just helping people who are not health hackers, people who are out there at the very cutting edge in the gym, just people who are saying, "I'm tired of being fat." Let's just do this in a way that isn't painful.

Will:

Right.

Dave:

What do you think about fiber during a fast? That's something that I know angers some people, I talked about it, but what's your medical take on adding some fiber during a fast? It's okay to say that you think it sucks, I have no idea what you're going to say.

Will:

Yeah, no, I mean, it's a good question. I actually never fully... Well, let's think of the pathway. So I'm thinking, normally, I would say, I have patients that are not really having fiber during a fast. One exception to that is I have some patients that do some resistance starch [crosstalk 00:41:11].

Dave:

[inaudible 00:41:11]. Like a soluble fiber or fiber that is not going to be digested but would be [inaudible 00:41:17].

Will:

Oh, yeah.

Dave:

[crosstalk 00:41:18].

Will:

That totally, I think that something like a resistant starch, honestly, could be really beneficial. I just got off of a webcam call right before we're talking right now with a patient, and she was actually in the UK, and she was struggling with that. She was [inaudible 00:41:34] slow GI motility. She was fasting, saw amazing benefits in every other area of her life, increased energy, weight loss resistance, overcame, improved sleep, all that stuff we want, but she saw decreased GI motility that I said, "Let's experiment with just having some potato starch or some resistant starch like that," to improve GI motility, improve microbiome diversity, and it really worked for her. So yeah, it's fine, because it's back to that earlier statement. It's not really having a negative effect on insulin, actually quite the opposite.

Dave:

Right.

Will:

We could improve insulin resistance, the opposite effect. So it may be anathema to the hardcore, militant keto dieter, but it's not for me. I think it can be really helpful.

Dave:

Well, I appreciate your clinical perspective on that, and I've been wearing a continuous glucose monitor for, I started doing that about three and a half years ago. The first time I was on, or second time I was on the Dr. Oz Show, they're like "What's that weird thing on your arm?" And I'm like, "That's my robot arm." I don't want to take it off, so we're kind of covering it with my shirt. So we have to explain it on camera. And he's such a kind, just a nice gentleman. But I remember that and thinking, "All right, I can

see what adding 20 grams of soluble prebiotic fiber does, and it doesn't move my blood sugar at all." Maybe it lowers it a little bit on average.

But then, if you're traveling and you still want to care about food, and I looked at all the pathways, I'm like, "You know what? I'm feeling solid about the research, but I don't see hundreds of patients a year like you do, because I don't see any patients because I'm not a doctor." So if you blew holes in it, I was really interested.

Will:

No, because intestinal gluconeogenesis, I mean, it's different than hepatic gluconeogenesis. So if you're having these things from fiber, even beyond resistant starch, even vegetables that have fiber can actually, really for most people, have an amazing effect on lowering insulin, lowering insulin resistance. So yeah, improving glucose tolerance is a good thing.

Dave:

What about things like the Fasting Mimicking Diet, or I talk about protein fasting in the book, where you just don't eat any protein at all, so you can still get some pathways. Do you think that that's too complex for people who are just starting out or is that something that's advisable or is it a gateway? Give me your clinical take on that.

Will:

I think that it's an amazing tool for people to experiment with. I don't think it's too complex for somebody and you explain it well, so I think as far as educating people, explaining why they're doing it, explaining the pathways and why you're doing it, I think it is actually quite inclusive and approachable for people. So, I don't see anything negative from it. And I think it's a good gateway to start leaning into these things that have been lying dormant probably for most of their lives, to start to awake these things up. And it's a good segue tool for many people. So yeah, it's a tool.

The Fasting Mimicking Diet itself, the program itself, it doesn't really taste that good, to be honest.

Dave:

Oh, no. It's a processed food kind of thing.

Will:

Yeah.

Dave:

I mean, more like the idea of 500 calories a day [crosstalk 00:44:40] too much protein.

Will:

The idea of it, yeah, yeah, yeah. And I love what Valter Longo is doing, so there's no knock on him. I love [crosstalk 00:44:45].

Dave:

None whatsoever. He's a godfather of fasting and ketosis and just a wise dude.

Will:

Right. And to be honest, with all the exciting research around it, I've still done it multiple times of just like, "Okay, there's some solid data behind this." Even if I don't love that random mushroom soup, I'm going to do it because of the larger work that he's done, and I respect that so much. But yeah, limiting calories, Fast Mimicking, the science is very compelling.

Dave:

If someone said, "Dr. Cole, I don't care about ketosis. In fact, I think ketosis is for stupid people but I want to do intermittent fasting. Am I going to get benefits from it?" What would you tell them?

Will:

I'd probably want to be friends with that person, because they push back a little bit and were interesting. But yeah, it's not all or nothing and I think even if somebody doesn't hit ketosis, and I have patients at the beginning, they're not doing that. But they still see amazing benefits. So it's not something they have to be super... They don't have to be a biohacker, if they're not. If it doesn't resonate with them, if they don't get into the measurements and the metrics and all that stuff, they're not testing beta hydroxybutyrate, they're not using a breath meter, or whatever, and they just want to go off of how they feel and see if their [inaudible 00:46:02] experiment actually improves their quality of life, that's totally fine. And I would assume there's a certain section of people that they will see amazing benefits, but if you measure their ketones, they would not be in ketosis, but they're just getting more good things in their life happen. The needle has moved for them significantly, even if they're not tapping into these pathways that, you and I know, have their own merit by themselves.

Dave:

I love that answer to and you can tell you've done a lot of clinical work. Because if someone's like, "I don't care about ketosis," try skipping breakfast, see what happens [crosstalk 00:46:36]. Yeah.

Will:

Yeah, lean into it. Lean into it. It should be. It should be like... because what are we trying to do here? We're trying to improve somebody's quality of life, and I see that happen even without all the perfected things, even when it doesn't look like it should be on paper, I see lives transformed. And I think that's really down to the awesome power that is the human body, is that you don't have to be perfect. You don't have to do everything that we're doing to see positive improvements in your health.

Dave:

You mentioned the Bible earlier, and fasting is just sprinkled throughout the Bible. It's like anytime someone does something bad.

Will:

Yeah. I'm glad you brought this up. But anyway. [inaudible 00:47:17].

Dave:

So but quite often, it's, oh, 40 days. Oh, is this allegorical or are there people out there with 40-day fasts?

Will:

Well, I'm sure it's allegorical in many ways. The Bible and many faith traditions are filled with symbolism. But I think it's without a doubt, I would assume that there are traditions where those are literal, too. So yeah, I mean, fasting has been used throughout history, obviously, because of food availability, and our genetics have adapted to that over time from an ancestral health perspective. But not just food wasn't available. People did it intentionally throughout time. And you talk about this through your book as well, is that all of these faiths, that were completely not connected, all had these practices to go deep within human experience and take themselves to the next level, whether that be physical, like healing, or spiritual, metaphysical.

So I think that you can tap into all of these things. So, in Judaism was used Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av, and Christianity and lent and many different festivals throughout Christianity, and Native Americans, indigenous people use them too. So there's so many cool examples of how they tapped into this position within, as Paracelsus said.

Dave:

I like that answer and I'm so intrigued with these really long things because I am getting a sense from reading old Ayurveda literature that there's probably some really crazy stuff that happens for longevity from very long fasts, but it seems like such a commitment that I don't really know when I would do that in my life, but I'm kind of interested.

Will:

Yeah, it's definitely... I'd be interested to see too, really experience what that looks like on the other side of those deeper fasts.

Dave:

You did something really creative in Intuitive Fasting that I liked. For me, I'm like, "Look, you save time and money on breakfast. There, go do something fun," right? Go live your life, and you're like, "Actually don't just fritter the time away, do something intentional and mindful." What is your top-recommended mindful activity that someone can do with the time they save from skipping a meal?

Will:

Yeah, so this metaphysical meal section in Intuitive Fasting, it's one of my favorite sections in it when I was, I forget where I was, it was at home during 2020 when everyone was at home, I guess. So I was thinking about, "Wow, this would be such an important thing." And I didn't call it metaphysical meals for my patients. And all of this stuff that I write about is typically just an outpouring of me seeing patients and seeing what works and what doesn't, all that stuff.

This was something that I talked to patients as mindfulness, but then for the, I'm like, "Oh wait, these people, I'm not there to walk through that with them." I'm not there as their functional medicine doctor, I want them to kind of adopt these things and have agency over their health in a way as if I'm not there, because I won't be there. So, I think that one of the best things that works for me, and back to your advice of whatever the fasting that's right for you is the fasting you'll stick with, I think the mindfulness practice that is right for you is the mindfulness practice that you stick with.

So for me, it's something that Eckhart Tolle, the author, calls inner body awareness, or he... Yeah, inner body awareness is probably the best way to describe it, and how he calls it, is just checking in with your body. It's feeling the aliveness of your body. So, without doing anything, you're just

breathing and becoming conscious of your breath, because your breath, like your heartbeat, is not something that you will, you're just watching the natural rhythm of your breath. It's allowing that that noise to subside, and even if thoughts come into your life, even if you're thinking about what you have to do, or your kids, what they're doing, or the noise that's kind of irritating, allowing that to pass through you. I think that is something that's worked for me, very much so, over my life, to start to grow that awareness and be my center.

It doesn't mean that I'm always there, at all, actually, but that's even more so. To show up to the gym one time and say, "The gym didn't work for me," it's that same thing that I think when people say, "Well, meditation is not for me." Well it's actually, you just have to create a practice and a routine, just like anything else, to start to build that mindfulness muscle. So I can have that resilience to go back to that when times are tough, when times aren't easy.

So when I'm consulting patient online, that's a big thing for me, is holding space for them and really listening to them. And I have to do that when I'm eating or fasting too. All of this stuff should be guided by that intuition. So that's one thing that works for me, at least.

Dave:

Okay, I love that. And one more question for you. Your exact favorite meal to break a fast with.

Will:

Hmm, yeah, I-

Dave:

I know you got recipes in your book.

Will:

Yeah.

Dave:

I don't know if it's one of those or something else.

Will:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, yeah. It's actually a recipe in Ketotarian, in my first book. I don't know if you remember this, but you and I met years ago at one of the first Revitalizes, my [Buddy Greene's 00:52:32] Revitalize-

Dave:

Yeah. I remember that.

Will:

In Arizona at-

Dave:

With Jason, yeah.

Will:

[Neer Eval 00:52:37], Jason, yeah. So anyways, just a long time ago. I adapted a recipe that I had at Revitalize in Ketotarian that I still love and I'm not going to be super like sciencey about it, because it just tastes amazing, but it is actually good for you. But it's avocado fries that are breaded, it's almond flour, and a chipotle aioli dressing. That, to me, is something that's easy to digest, it tastes delicious, it's an avocado, and I love the chipotle aioli dressing. So, honestly, that's one of my favorite meals that I love to just have quick on the go when I'm breaking a fast. But I mean-

Dave:

Avocado fries, are you actually frying avocado?

Will:

No, they're baked.

Dave:

Okay, cool. So you're basically breading it and then baking it. Okay, cool.

Will:

Yeah. Yeah.

Dave:

Wow. I haven't tried that, but I used to not like warm avocado because I think I didn't know how to do it right, but when you get it exactly right, it's really creamy and it's so good.

Will:

Yeah, exactly. That's how these are when they're done right.

Dave:

Nice. Well, I'm going to have to look for that recipe. I haven't tried yet. Amazing. Is there anything else you'd like to say about intuitive fasting that you think would serve a couple hundred thousand people listening to this?

Will:

Thank you for the opportunity. I mean, an ethos that's woven throughout intuitive fasting and all that I do with my patients, it's all of this stuff, all this amazing science and practical tools to better your life, it's all secondary to your head and your heart. And back to that why are you doing what you're doing? Is this born out of stress and obsession or shame or is this born out of serving yourself, and being the best version of yourself, so you can be there for the ones you love, and using self-care as a form of self-respect instead of a self-punishment.

So I think that, something that I say that's very true to my work is, "You can't heal a body you hate." You cannot shame your way into wellness. You can't obsess your way to health. And that all of that stuff, is the genesis of sustainable wellness. When you get that right, doesn't mean you're perfect, does not mean you're perfect, no one's perfect. I'm not perfect. None of us are perfect with this stuff. But when you start growing in awareness of that, of self-respect and love and compassion for yourself,

like you said, the kindness towards yourself, that at least is a firm foundation for awesome things for your wellness. So your fasts are going to be amazing, your food's going to be amazing, all this stuff will be on a... Find a fertile ground of kindness for yourself.

Dave:

Man, I love that. We're all a little short on kindness for ourself and others and ultimately, it's hard to be intuitive if you haven't developed a little bit of kindness.

Will:

Amen.

Dave:

So I love it that that's the ultimate message here. It's the right one for sure. And my ask for you would be, keep saying that in all the work that you do, because you're one of the guys who shares the keto diet, not from, keto diet and fasting, but just not from that place of anger, but a place of, there's something in it for you and for us all.

Will:

Yes.

Dave:

And that's why all this stuff matters. So thanks for being one of the good ones.

Will:

Thank you, you too.

Dave:

And I appreciate being on Bulletproof Radio as well, your book, Intuitive Fasting is worth reading and guys listening, here's what to do. Go to your favorite place where you like to buy books and if you haven't picked up Fast This Way, do it. If you've already picked up Fast This Way, that's okay, but do it and order Intuitive Fasting at the same time. And what that's going to do is that's going to show everyone who buys books that those two books go together, which is really cool. So, they'll basically notice with the algorithms if you've already purchased one or the other, but buy them both. They're synergistic. They work together and you'll get things in each book that you don't get in the other one. And neither of these two books is yet another book on here's why you should fast. That book has been written multiple times, so it's hard to do something new and interesting and truly, there are things in here that you want to read because you don't already know it.